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SUBJECT: ROMANOWSKI DELEGATION RECEIVES UNPRECEDENTED COVERAGE IN  
TURKMENISTAN'S STATE MEDIA

Reftel: Ashgabat

Summary

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¶1. (U) The May 2-5 visit to Turkmenistan of an education delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Alina L. Romanowski received wide coverage in state media. Her meetings with government officials from Turkmenistan's Mejlis (parliament), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education received Turkmenistan media attention. State media also gave wide coverage to Romanowski's visit to the Dashoguz region, where she met with local authorities, visited a local school and attended the closing ceremony of Aksaray Ding Tower restoration project, funded through a U.S. State Department "Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation" (AFCP) grant. State media ignored some events in Romanowski's program and inaccurately reported her visit to School 27 in Ashgabat. End Summary.

State Media Highlights Romanowski's Arrival

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¶2. (U) On May 2, state-run Watan TV News announced Romanowski's arrival and purpose of discussing a new direction in Turkmenistan-American cooperation in education, culture, and sports. The report accurately stated that Romanowski coordinated professional, cultural, and youth exchange programs. The report praised her meetings with representatives of the Mejlis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Education. Romanowski expressed the United States' desire to cooperate in the large-scale education reforms initiated by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The report highlighted appreciation of bilateral partnerships in education, specifically naming Fulbright, FLEX, Edmund Muskie and other U.S. exchange programs. Hundreds of Turkmenistanis studied in the United States through those exchange programs, where they improved their knowledge of English and made friends with American colleagues, according to the broadcast. (Comment: Post fights yearly to keep these programs alive, let alone get any positive media coverage on them. End Comment.) The report described Romanowski's visit to School 27 in Ashgabat and her trip to Dashoguz City to meet with local authorities, visit School 13, and travel to the Aksaray Ding AFCP. The report noted that Turkmenistan and American specialists reconstructed this historical monument with funding from the "Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation" grant. (Note: No American specialists were directly involved; only the funding was American. End Note.) The next day, state dailies

"Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 35,211) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 28,091) gave coverage with similar content.

#### Inaccuracy and Omission in State Media Coverage

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13. (U) Both May 2 state Watan TV News and May 3 state dailies coverage inaccurately reported that Romanowski had already visited School 27 in Ashgabat, when she did not do so until noon of May 3. (Note: Turkmenistan's media often inaccurately report details of PAO events to give lip-service support but to prevent interested locals from attending on their own initiative. End Note.) The state media also omitted Romanowski's visit to Magtymguly Turkmen State University and meetings with the governor of the Dashoguz region and education department officials.

#### State Media Highlights Dashoguz Visit

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14. (U) Romanowski and her delegation's May 4 visit to Dashoguz Province received broad coverage on state Watan TV News (Turkmen) the following day. The news broadcast reported on her visit to School 13 and the Beki Seytakov Pedagogical School. The broadcast played various video scenes displaying the delegation arriving at School 13, sitting at student desks, watching performances by students, visiting classrooms, speaking to students and holding discussions at the pedagogical institute. (Note: Interestingly, the video never included the Dashoguz deputy governor, who sat at a student's desk next to Romanowski. End Note.) The news broadcast put a heavy emphasis on Romanowski's closing ceremony of the Aksaray Ding tower restoration project. The broadcast quoted Romanowski: "Now this monument will be preserved for future generations." The coverage of the ceremony included video scenes of Romanowski giving

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remarks and speaking to locals. The broadcast followed with a long, accurate interview, where she summarized the purpose of her visit and the U.S. government's willingness to expand cooperation with Turkmenistan in the education sphere. Romanowski expressed support for President Berdimuhamedov's ideas of reforming education to meet international standards through the exchange of specialists. She also expressed the United States' plans to expand these academic and professional exchange programs. Romanowski noted the Aksaray Ding project was one of seven "Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation" program projects in the country and expressed satisfaction in supporting Turkmenistan's ancient and rich history. On May 5, the Dashoguz visit received coverage in state dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 35,211), "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 28,091) and on the pro-government website TURKMENISTAN.RU (Russian, English).

15. (U) On May 11, state TV-4 Channel (Turkmen, Russian, English, French, Chinese, Arabic, and Persian) aired a 20-minute long program about Romanowski and her delegation's visit to Turkmenistan. The program gave coverage similar to that used in Watan TV News on the visit to the Dashoguz region and included personal interviews of the five other members in the delegation. The interviewees gave a summary of their areas of interest, purpose of their visit, and gave their impressions of Turkmenistan. Embassy's PAO gave background information about the "Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation" projects in Turkmenistan and the Aksaray Ding tower restoration project. State TV-4 replayed the program several times on subsequent days.

#### COMMENT

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16. (U) State media gave positive coverage to Romanowski's program throughout her visit. State media praised American-Turkmen cooperation in the areas of education and cultural preservation. The level of coverage was truly unprecedented in comparison with other VIP visits or Embassy programs. Post was astonished and pleased with the coverage state media gave on Romanowski visit. End Comment.

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